Military Discharges

Photo: Getty Images

THERE ARE TWO FORMS OF MILITARY SEPARATION OR DISCHARGE

1. **Administrative** – This form of discharge is given by the discharge authority, often a commanding officer of high rank.

2. **Punitive** – This form of discharge is imposed by a court-martial.

Source: https://va.org/forms-of-military-discharge/

Types of Administrative Discharges

For those who receive an “Administrative Discharge” there are four:

1. Honorable Discharge
Almost all enlisted receive an honorable discharge once their service ends. This means you met the standards of conduct and performance while enlisted and that your service was meritorious so as to receive a medal for bravery or valor. You could have disciplinary action on your record but if you received a medal for valor on the battlefield it may still get you off with an honorable discharge.

2. General Discharge (under honorable conditions)
This is often referred to as a general discharge and is bestowed upon those whose serve was faithful and honest in spite of some trouble—as determined by the commander. You might receive this discharge if you were discharged on the basis of:

Administrative Discharge
2. General Discharge (under honorable conditions) Continued

You might receive this discharge if you were discharged on the basis of:

- failure to maintain military standards in weight
- failure to maintain military standards in fitness
- failure to maintain military standards in dress
- failure to maintain military standards in appearance
- failure to progress in your training
- you received minor disciplinary infractions

Administrative Discharge
3. Other Than Honorable Discharge

Of all the **administrative** discharges this is the worst. This is warranted if your discharge was for a pattern of bad behavior. This can include:

- a pattern of continued misconduct
- an act of serious misconduct
- abuse of authority
- fraternization

Anyone who receives a court-martial conviction without punitive discharges is given this discharge characterization.

Administrative Discharge

4. Entry-level Separation

This form of discharge has no characterization. It is not honorable or general. It can be granted by a commander for members who were in the military for less than 180 days. In other words it is for those who tried but could not make it during basic training and immediately after.

Types of Punitive Discharges

PUNITIVE DISCHARGES

A punitive discharge can only be imposed by a court-martial. Summary courts[1] do not have the authority to impose a punitive discharge.

A commanding officer can decide to initiate an administrative discharge proceeding separately if you are convicted of an offense by a court martial.

There are **three** types of punitive discharges:

1. A summary court-martial is **the lowest level of court-martial available**. It is designed to promptly resolve minor offenses under a simple procedure. While it has lower maximum punishments than the other two types of court-martial, it also has fewer rights for the accused (that is, you, the person facing the charges).

Punitive Discharge

1. Bad Conduct Discharge

This discharge can be imposed by a special court or general court. It is given as part of a court punishment to **enlisted personnel only**. **Officers cannot** receive this discharge. It is often given for conviction of:

- absent without leave (AWOL)
- drunk on duty
- driving while under the influence
- Adultery
- disorderly conduct
- bad checks

Punitive Discharge

2. Dismissal

When you are an **officer** you can be dismissed from military service. This discharge can be imposed by a special or general court and is often enforced alongside the maximum punishment as listed by the Manual for Courts Martial. It is an officer version of a bad conduct discharge.

3. Dishonorable Discharge

This type of discharge is the worst anyone in the military can receive. It can only be given by a general court-martial for the highest of offenses which are often accompanied by a prison sentence in a military prison.

Disclaimer – National Archives

Temporary Reduction in Onsite Operations at the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) in St. Louis

Temporary Reduction in Onsite Operations at the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) in St. Louis

Due to the increase in Covid-19 transmission, the NPRC is operating at a reduced capacity. As of January 6, 2022, the NPRC has reduced its on-site staffing to 25 percent of its pre-pandemic level. We are continuing to service requests and as always, we will prioritize requests involving burials, emergency medical treatments, homeless veterans seeking shelter, and comparable emergencies. Servicing will continue on all other types of requests, but response times will be further delayed.

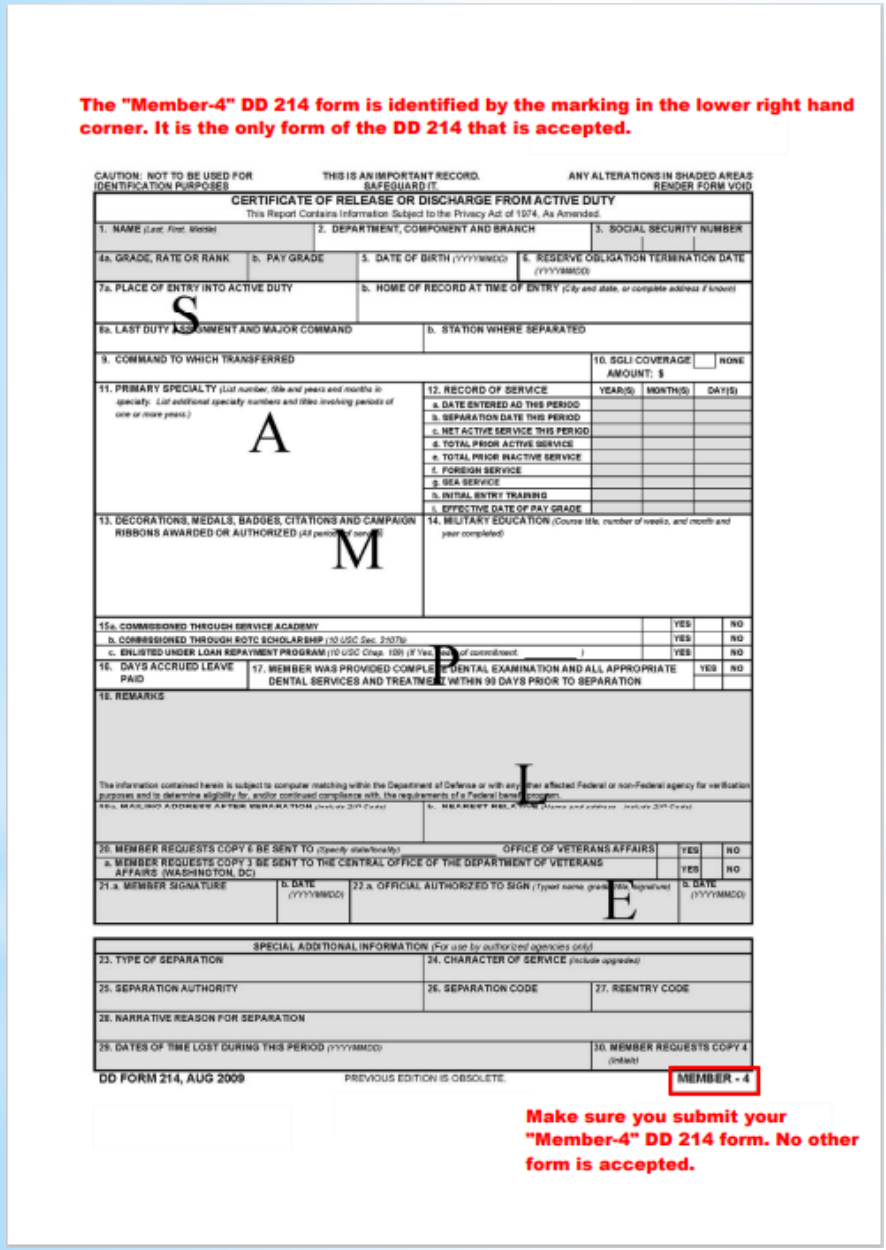
- **More information on NPRC's operating status**
- **Alternative sources for modern military records**
- More information about the National Archives' response to coronavirus can be found at archives.gov/coronavirus.

- **More information on NPRC's operating status**

- **Alternative sources for modern military records**

Source: https://www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records

DD-214 Form



The "Member-4" DD 214 form is identified by the marking in the lower right hand corner. It is the only form of the DD 214 that is accepted.

CAUTION: NOT TO BE USED FOR IDENTIFICATION PURPOSES — THIS IS AN IMPORTANT RECORD. SAFEGUARD IT. — ANY ALTERATIONS IN SHADED AREAS RENDER FORM VOID

CERTIFICATE OF RELEASE OR DISCHARGE FROM ACTIVE DUTY

This Report Contains Information Subject to the Privacy Act of 1974, As Amended.

1. NAME (Last, First, Middle) | 2. DEPARTMENT, COMPONENT AND BRANCH | 3. SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER

4a. GRADE, RATE OR RANK | b. PAY GRADE | 5. DATE OF BIRTH (YYYYMMDD) | 6. RESERVE OBLIGATION TERMINATION DATE (YYYYMMDD)

7a. PLACE OF ENTRY INTO ACTIVE DUTY | b. HOME OF RECORD AT TIME OF ENTRY (City and state, or complete address if known)

S

8a. LAST DUTY ASSIGNMENT AND MAJOR COMMAND | b. STATION WHERE SEPARATED

9. COMMAND TO WHICH TRANSFERRED | 10. SGLI COVERAGE AMOUNT: $ | NONE

11. PRIMARY SPECIALTY (List number, title and years and months in specialty. List additional specialty numbers and titles involving periods of one or more years.)

A

12. RECORD OF SERVICE | YEAR(S) | MONTH(S) | DAY(S)
a. DATE ENTERED AD THIS PERIOD
b. SEPARATION DATE THIS PERIOD
c. NET ACTIVE SERVICE THIS PERIOD
d. TOTAL PRIOR ACTIVE SERVICE
e. TOTAL PRIOR INACTIVE SERVICE
f. FOREIGN SERVICE
g. SEA SERVICE
h. INITIAL ENTRY TRAINING
i. EFFECTIVE DATE OF PAY GRADE

13. DECORATIONS, MEDALS, BADGES, CITATIONS AND CAMPAIGN RIBBONS AWARDED OR AUTHORIZED (All periods of service)

M

14. MILITARY EDUCATION (Course title, number of weeks, and month and year completed)

15a. COMMISSIONED THROUGH SERVICE ACADEMY | YES | NO
b. COMMISSIONED THROUGH ROTC SCHOLARSHIP (10 USC Sec. 2107b) | YES | NO
c. ENLISTED UNDER LOAN REPAYMENT PROGRAM (10 USC Chap. 109) (If Yes, type of commitment: _____) | YES | NO

16. DAYS ACCRUED LEAVE PAID

17. MEMBER WAS PROVIDED COMPLETE DENTAL EXAMINATION AND ALL APPROPRIATE DENTAL SERVICES AND TREATMENT WITHIN 90 DAYS PRIOR TO SEPARATION | YES | NO

P

18. REMARKS

The information contained herein is subject to computer matching within the Department of Defense or with any other affected Federal or non-Federal agency for verification purposes and to determine eligibility for, and/or continued compliance with, the requirements of a Federal benefit program.

L

19a. MAILING ADDRESS AFTER SEPARATION (Include Zip Code) | b. NEAREST RELATIVE (Name and address. Include Zip Code)

20. MEMBER REQUESTS COPY 6 BE SENT TO (Specify state/territory) OFFICE OF VETERANS AFFAIRS | YES | NO
a. MEMBER REQUESTS COPY 3 BE SENT TO THE CENTRAL OFFICE OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS (WASHINGTON, DC) | YES | NO

21a. MEMBER SIGNATURE | b. DATE (YYYYMMDD) | 22a. OFFICIAL AUTHORIZED TO SIGN (Typed name, grade, title, signature) | b. DATE (YYYYMMDD)

E

SPECIAL ADDITIONAL INFORMATION (For use by authorized agencies only)

23. TYPE OF SEPARATION | 24. CHARACTER OF SERVICE (Include upgrades)

25. SEPARATION AUTHORITY | 26. SEPARATION CODE | 27. REENTRY CODE

28. NARRATIVE REASON FOR SEPARATION

29. DATES OF TIME LOST DURING THIS PERIOD (YYYYMMDD) | 30. MEMBER REQUESTS COPY 4 (Initials)

DD FORM 214, AUG 2009 — PREVIOUS EDITION IS OBSOLETE. — MEMBER - 4

Make sure you submit your "Member-4" DD 214 form. No other form is accepted.

- **The DD-214 will contain:**
- Date and place of entry into active duty
- Home address at time of entry
- Date and place of release from active duty
- Home address after separation
- Last duty assignment and rank
- Military job specialty
- Military education
- Decorations, medals, badges, citations and campaign awards received
- Total creditable service
- Foreign service credited
- Separation information (date and type of separation, character of service, authority and reason for separation and separation and reenlistment eligibility codes)

https://www.cbp.gov/sites/default/files/assets/documents/2016-Oct/Example%20DD214%20Member-4%20Copy.pdf

Where are these records?

1.Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) records: For further information call the VA Toll Free number 1-800-827-1000.

2.Pay records: If available at all, these would be at the various Department of Defense Finance Centers.

3.Records of veterans who have been separated from active service but have reserve status, either active or inactive: Contact the Reserve Component of the appropriate branch of service.

4.Older military personnel records, generally prior to WWI depending on the service branch are on file at the National Archives and Records Administration, Old Military and Civil Records Branch (NWCTB), Washington, DC 20408.
See Requesting Copies of Older Military Service Records for more information.

Where are these records? Continued

5. Official Military Personnel Files (OMPF) of veterans who have been discharged, retired or who have died in service since January 1, 1995 (Navy), January 1, 1999 (Marine Corps) and October 1, 2004 (Air Force): Contact the Personnel Center or Headquarters of the appropriate branch of service. The Army, since October 1, 2002, has also ceased retiring OMPFs of former service members to the NPRC; however, the NPRC has access to those records and will service your requests. See Records Location Table for complete details.

6. Records of members currently in the National Guard: Contact the Adjutant General's office of the appropriate state. The National Guard Bureau website contains additional information.

7. Records of former National Guard members who were not called into active federal service: Contact the Adjutant General of the state in which the member served.

8. Recent active duty Health Records: Formerly, when a member was released, discharged or retired from active duty, the military services retired the health record to the NPRC with the personnel record portion (**note:** the Department of the Navy retired its health and personnel records to the NPRC separately until the late 1980s).

Where are these records? Continued

However, in the 1990s, the military services discontinued the practice of filing health records with the personnel record portion. In 1992, the Army began retiring most of its former members' health records to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

Over the next six years, the other services followed suit - Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps in 1994 and Coast Guard in 1998 (see Records Location Table for a listing of personnel and health record holdings and locations). In 2014, the military services discontinued the practice of retiring the records to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). In order to determine where a medical record is located, please see the chart below:

Branch	Status	Date	Record Location
Army	Discharged, retired, or separated from any component	10/16/1992 to 12/31/2013	Department of VA, Records Management Center
		on or after 01/01/2014	AMEDD Record Processing Center
Navy	Discharged, retired, or separated from any component	01/31/1994 to 12/31/2013	Department of VA, Records Management Center
		on or after 01/01/2014	BUMED Navy Medicine Records Activity
Air Force	Discharged, retired, or separated from any component	05/01/1994 to 12/31/2013	Department of VA, Records Management Center
		on or after 01/01/2014	AF STR Processing Center
	Discharged or retired from Reserves or National Guard	06/01/1994 to 12/31/2013	Department of VA, Records Management Center
		on or after 01/01/2014	AF STR Processing Center
Marine Corps	Discharged, retired, or separated from any component	05/01/1994 to 12/31/2013	Department of VA, Records Management Center
		on or after 01/01/2014	BUMED Navy Medicine Records Activity
Coast Guard	Discharged, retired, or separated from Active Duty - Reservists with 90 days active	04/01/1998 to 09/30/2014	Department of VA, Records Management Center

Additional Information

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_discharge

https://www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records/about-service-records-0

https://historyhub.history.gov/docs/DOC-1088

https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/United_States_Enlistment_and_Discharge_Records